

Approaching September 11, 2002: Will America, should America, can America “do everything alone”

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The forthcoming September 11 will mark the anniversary of the horrible terrorist attack not only upon the symbols of the military and economic power of America, but also upon its population. It was the first time since 1812 that a major attack was performed against the continental part of U.S. territory. Confronted with the new enemy the friendly borders with Canada and Mexico, as well as the two oceans, no longer guard the inviolability of American soil. There are no absolute barriers for the new type of war against the U.S.A. Explosive blows performed with big aircraft with many passengers and with high-octane fuel melted not only the steel traverses of the World Trade Center; they did also melt away the feeling of both the invulnerability of domestic soil and personal security in regard to an external enemy - a feeling that was particularly strong after the Cold War ended and the U.S.S.R. as a potential source of an offensive or retaliatory nuclear attack collapsed. It is not possible to overestimate - and it would be equally shortsighted to underestimate - the pivotal significance and effect that this historic event produced for the American state institutions and the American people.

Suddenly, to the forefront came the permeability of U.S. borders and the relaxed American system and free society. Facts are stunning. The Americans and foreigners cross the American borders half a billion times in a year; 340,000 vehicles enter the U.S.A. every day. Last year there were seven million foreigners who were illegally in the U.S.A., three million with expired visas. Every year 20,000 foreigners were trained in thousands of private pilot schools; around half a million of foreign students are studying (or “study”) at American colleges. U.S. Coastal Guard points out that in the U.S.A. every day 59,000 pieces of cargo are unloaded in the U.S.A. and less than 3 percent undergo control.

In such circumstances there emerged a new sense of American vulnerability and, simultaneously, a realistic perception of the huge American superiority and global domination; the result is that currently the American administration, establishment and the broadest public have arrived at the following prevailing consensus: We do not want to do everything by ourselves, but we nonetheless will do by ourselves everything that we have to do, according to our sovereign judgement. If it really is not necessary - we should not act alone, but when it is, then we should! Of course, not everywhere and not in every respect can we act alone, but we can do a lot alone and we shall be able to do ever more, because in regard to all the others our power is continuing to grow, and the others are increasingly lagging behind.

The above are only introductory remarks. Further on we shall try to elaborate the relevant, most topical and controversial aspects related to the U.S. power, U.S. action and role as they are seen from the U.S.A., and bearing in mind debates here which are intensively engaging parts of American public opinion, though not yet shaking it up. In this we shall endeavor to build upon actual facts and not upon any wishful thinking of what we should preferably do.

American sovereign supremacy and action - facing facts unsentimentally

In responding to the September 11 attack, the U.S.A. started from its right to respond (with others, or alone, under UN cover if feasible, and without it if not) by military and other means where it decided that it should do so against those who started the latest phase of terrorist warfare against it - all with a view of the need to eliminate or at least disable the enemy, in this case Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime. This time they received a very broad political and moral support of the majority of the international community, the consent of the UN Security Council and, which was more important for it, the military participation of NATO members and logistic cooperation of a number of countries in wide spaces of Central Asia and the Middle East, the so-called “coalition of the willing”.

By the way, it should be pointed out that the prior consent of the Security Council, although always desirable, is not always indispensable to make in the final analysis an obviously necessary military intervention a constructive one, with positive results for certain regions and the entire international community. Both the military intervention of U.S. and other forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with UN mandate, but also in Kosovo and in Serbia, without previous consent of the Security Council, has put an end to our slaughters and ethnic cleansing, has established the necessary international protectorates, and since then there is no more warfare in former Yugoslavia. (There was limited fighting in Macedonia in 2001, which was brought to an end under pressure and with support of NATO and the European Union and by agreement of the major political forces in Macedonia).

As far as the “moral right” of the United States to conduct military action is concerned, it is stressed that all true or alleged crimes, aggression, hegemonism, arrogance, injustice and selfishness of the U.S.A., or those perpetrated in the name of the U.S.A., do not in the least diminish their right to strike in response to attack. Neither war, nor the response have to be traditional, and experts in the field of international law will have to catch up with the new realities. The right to self-defence can hardly belong to the morally pure ones only. There were objections that only after the mortal danger loomed over them did the United States vociferate about the duty of all to fight against terrorism - and to that is Dr. Samuel Johnson’s: “depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully”. Also, the fact is that the U.S.A. entered World War II only after Pearl Harbor, or the U.S.S.R. only after Hitler’s attack, which did not make their war against the Third Reich less just and less beneficial for all.

Top officials in the Bush administration and the “strategists” close to it have come to the conclusion - no doubt formulated also with the view of the elections, but not only because of them - that the U.S.A. has not reacted sufficiently strongly to the series of terrorist attacks since 1993. Among them are: Somalia (Mogadishu) and the explosion of the bomb in the World Trade Center 1993; bombs upon American barracks and installations in Saudi Arabia - Riyadh 1995, Khobar 1996; bombs upon Embassies in Nairobi and Dar-Es-Salaam 1998; devastating “kamikaze” attack upon the USS Cole in Aden in 2000. The assessment is that the response was not such as to discourage support to terrorist organizations and their attacks against American objects, interests and people. This is also the message to those who criticize the United States for an “excessive” use of military power in Afghanistan, namely “that strong action” in Afghanistan is also a warning to the all “axis of evil” (Iraq-North Korea-Libya-Syria, etc.) not to “play with fire” because that is the way to perdition, as it was for the Taliban.

This “clearing of the underbrush” must touch upon the debate about the United States as the “world policeman” - with questions such as: is the U.S.A. really a world policeman or not, and does they want to be one, or is this “role”, or “duty” imposed upon it by virtue of circumstances and as an objective reflection of its power; and if that is so, is that good or bad for the world which needs something of this kind; and since the UN are not always capable of performing that role then... The administration of Bush-father - among other reasons for not intervening in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991-1993 - stressed that the U.S.A. refuses to be the “world policeman”.

In fact, in a certain way and to a certain extent the U.S.A. already is the world policeman, positive or negative - depending on how, and when, and where, and on one’s vantage point, and for whom it might be helpful. No aprioristic or one-sided attitudes, either in praise or censure, are of much worth here.

Where, and with the arms, does the American “world policeman” patrol? American troops have been stationed for more than half a century in Germany, Japan and South Korea; complete American fleets cruise the seas around Taiwan, in the Gulf and in the Mediterranean, preserving the status quo (cynics would say: Status Quo Vadis?), securing American strategic interests (oil) and safety of the allies, serving as launching pads for military interventions (Kuwait, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Afghanistan); American bases are spread around the world; American soldiers are engaged in Afghanistan, in the Philippines, in Georgia, Yemen, etc. in various antiterrorist missions, and they are stationed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Kosovo and in Macedonia. The United States dominate NATO and the key world economic institutions. Russia and China have de facto acquiesced to such a role of the U.S.A. Russia has come to terms with the forthcoming expansion of NATO right to its borders, with American unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and the endeavors of the Bush administration to establish anti-missile defence. China has somehow “swallowed” the bombing of its Embassy in Belgrade, the incursion of the American “spy” plane, and it also tolerates American military protection of Taiwan. Both Russia and China act rationally, because both very much need cooperation with the U.S.A. and American benevolence in matters of their vital economic and other interests, among others in subduing separatist and fundamentalist Islamic movements.

Certainly, no “world policeman” could reach everywhere, do everything and stay there forever. America does not and cannot control all movements in the world. Here, in the U.S.A, many point out that every world dominant power until today was faced with broad opposing alliances, continuous mutinies, dethronement or retreat. However, in the case of the United States something of this kind, at least in the foreseeable future, is not in sight. There are no coalitions of great powers and other states being created against America. To the contrary. True, the U.S.A. was dismissed from the UN Commission for Human Rights, they often remain very lonely (with Israel and a few others) in massive votes in the UN General Assembly against some of its “retrograde” standpoints, Russia and China have relations with Iraq, Iran etc. which do not please the U.S.A. - but these are the dimensions of international relations which do not reflect directly upon the main positions of power. The European Union, Russia, China, each in its own way and in accordance with their wishes and potentials, can have plans and dreams to become genuine global rivals of America - but in this article we do not deal with multi-decade prognoses, which, by the way, so often prove wrong.

It is not news, but it bears repeating, that the American power and global reach rest, among other, upon their gigantic economy which is still the most dynamic and most propulsive in the world, with a GDP of over eleven trillion (thousand billions) of dollars; with a growing population of about 300 million, with constant immigration waves and “brain inflow” from all over the world, which produce an unprecedented cross-fertilization in the sciences, technology, informatics, culture, arts, and which is growing exponentially.

For our today’s topic the factor of primary importance is U.S. military power. The U.S. military budget for the current fiscal year amounts to 343 billion dollars. The military budgets of the remaining 18 members of NATO, together with Japan, South Korea and Australia, amount to a total of 212,6 billion dollars. In this “war” situation Bush asked the Congress - and it is hard to believe he will not get it - to agree with an annual increase of 48 billion dollars for a number of succeeding years. This annual increase makes 150% of total annual defence spending of Great Britain and France. It is said that the U.S.A. spends more on military “research and development” than the rest of the world together. These are literally mega-quantities - and the gap between the U.S.A. and the rest of the world is still growing.

Of course, neither in principle nor in practice is every use of American military force only and purely just, human, out of good intentions and necessarily to the benefit of everyone. As we know, it can happen that a military action of the U.S.A. is partly, or even fully, unjust, inhuman, ill intentioned and to the detriment of all. One can be against the one or against the other, but as long as there is no available credible or reliable, powerful ally ready for confrontation, who ever is rational and who does not unscrupulously sacrifice his own people at the altar of the abandoned and ruined “honor” and “dignity”, will take care not to run into trouble. Up to now, a significant majority of responsible governments and other international factors have understood this.

However, exactly such an “irresponsible international factor”, as is the present extremist Islamic fundamentalism which wages war against the U.S.A., does not normally defer to conventional military and economic power and up to now was capable of waging war in a very unconventional way.

Where is the U.S.A. today in the “global war” against terrorism?

a) The balance sheet up to now:

Afghanistan is no longer an undisturbed base, shelter or testing camp for Al Qaeda militants. In Afghanistan life is better nowadays, or, rather less horrible and with less dying and killing than under the Taliban regime. However, military operations did not cease, Al Qaeda is not eliminated, the majority of its main leaders have not been captured, and its members and allies fight in Afghanistan also from Pakistan. In Afghanistan war goes on, although on a much smaller scale and sporadically.

It is difficult to discern whether and what effect the American overwhelming military power in action in Afghanistan had on regimes inclined to terrorism, or supportive of terrorism. The fact reigns that there is great caution, nobody steps out to get in the cross hairs. For how long, remains to be seen.

Equally, one should not underestimate all that America and other countries which cooperate with it (their police, intelligence and other special services, banks and electronic services, diplomacies) have achieved up to now in

finding and disabling the Al Qaeda networks, its financial flows and its entire international infrastructure. However, it is warned that its “moles” and underground cells survive and are waiting to “surface”.

Contrary to routinized prognoses, the famous “Arab street” did not rise because of the “crusade” in Afghanistan and until now did not overthrow the conservative Islamic regimes, pronounced allies of the U.S.A. However, the inflamed Israeli-Arab conflict and the possible Indian-Pakistani war weaken and burden the fragile American front of cooperation with Islamic regimes (Pakistan and others) which are willing or half-willing to participate in actions against anti-American terrorism, complicating preparations for a confrontation with Iraq.

After September 11, 2001, the United States has made some partial corrections in certain segments of its world conduct, such as: paying their debts to the UN; announcing a 50% increase in their actually parsimonious and reduced economic assistance to the poorest countries; the agreement to codify a radical reduction of American and Russian strategic nuclear warheads in a recently concluded Russian-American treaty. However, the United States not only persist in its American exceptionalism (example: Americans do not recognize the International Criminal Court) and in its “pragmatic” unilateralism (example: abandoning the Kyoto treaty on global warming). In his recent “programmatic” speech in the West Point Military Academy Bush introduced also the “new” “doctrine” of a U.S. right to “preventive self-defence”, i.e. to hit without waiting to be attacked, and to do so even before the potential aggressor would master weapons of mass destruction. According to Bush’s words, he would prefer to do this in coalition with other great powers and to stabilize peace in world regions together with them - but this would not be his requirement for every preventive action. Israeli Prime Minister Sharon is also quoting the right to preventive attack, and the government of India is in a similar way formulating its possible military intentions regarding terror from Kashmir and Pakistan. It seems as if the newly proclaimed right or “right” is getting habituated and is spreading around.

b) The United States and its allies

Questions such as: how much does the U.S.A. really need the military contribution of their allies, how much can they rely upon them and how much should they, or how much do they have to take into account the views and interests that are different from their own ones, or how much is NATO relevant today anyway and suitable for action - to mention just a few - are not only issues in lively transatlantic debates, but also of daily, very concrete policy pursuits, in tactical and strategic, political and military decision-making. There is little that is very firm and very categorical here - except for the belonging to a specific group of nations for the purpose of protecting their fundamental interests.

Theoretically, the U.S.A. “could” have done the job in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo just by themselves, but the significant participation of allies who now, nota bene, carry the prevailing burden of military and civilian engagement, was more than useful or at least welcome. When the U.S.A. established consensus on military action (bombing) against Kosovo and against Serbia under Milosevic, not even Greece and France used veto, but the U.S.A. did submit to a “committee-type” decision-making on targeting, thus not enjoying completely free hands. They have obviously decided that this is a necessary and reasonable price for the show of allied solidarity.

Those subscribing to the “harder”, “unilateralist” wing of the American military-political establishment who are closer to the Pentagon’s more belligerent faction, are very critical of European members of NATO (except of Great Britain) because of “low”, sometimes even declining, military budgets and because of not meeting the commitments undertaken to modernize their armed forces. And, they point at their consequent inability to keep pace with American military action in Kosovo and, much more, in Afghanistan. It is from these positions that they maintain that NATO is increasingly becoming an “empty shell”, pushed by developments to the periphery of interests.

On the other side, those of the more multilateralist side of the same establishment, who are closer to the more cautious wing in Pentagon and the State Department, point out that the 140 billion of dollars, which the West European members annually expend for defence, are not exactly “peanuts”. They also point to their already mentioned full engagement in the Balkans, and stress that out of nineteen members of NATO, sixteen have been engaged in Afghanistan in different ways, among them seven in military operations.

Actually, Bush’s administration - like any other American administration, typically - does everything in order to secure as wide a circle of participating countries as possible (allies from NATO and others) for any serious and

complex undertaking. Without their clear or tacit participation and support (political and material support, bases, permission to use land, naval or air routes, etc.) the U.S.A., alone and completely denuded, can hardly perform well, if at all, depending on concrete circumstances of each given campaign. However, in the rather improbable case that they should find itself, or would bring itself, into such a situation, they would not hesitate to undertake a completely lonely action, deeming that a passive stance would represent a greater risk. And with what end results and consequences for the United States itself and the others - is another question, but to discuss it generally, abstractly, aprioristically and apodictically, from whatever point of view, would not make anybody much wiser.

In the meantime, discussion is going on whether and how an expanded NATO - whose engagement in the Balkans gave it a shot in arm - should get a concrete role in the “global war” against terrorism, as well as a possible peace keeping role in regions beyond Europe, particularly in the Middle East.

c) The United States and the “rest” of the world

In the immediate aftermath of the catastrophic attack in September, there were initially many of those in the U.S.A. who expected, or better to say, hoped that the “rude awakening” will lead Bush’s administration to turn full steam ahead to establishing a more genuine partnership with the international community in order to “drain swamp” of unimaginable poverty, disease, exploitation, endemic warfare, humiliation and hatred, which are favorable to the ideology, demagoguery and practice of terrorism. Some of the already mentioned corrections, though marginal, gave rise to such hopes. However, no “big turnaround” occurred, at least until now. For instance, there is no clear message to Sharon that the U.S.A. does not support Israel unconditionally and that Israeli politics of violence in the occupied territories is incompatible with a continuation of American support and assistance. There is no Republican ultimatum of the kind that Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles gave to Israel, Great Britain and France in 1956, forcing them to withdraw from Suez and Sinai. On the contrary, the U.S. Congress, which in these matters is more biased than both the Administration and the American public, treats equally Sharon’s punitive expeditions and the American war against terrorism.

There is no new “Marshall plan” for the huge regions in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where millions of people are terribly suffering. Even Henry Kissinger in his latest book underlined that neglecting hard and unjust consequences of a ruthless globalization in the “Third World” boomerangs on the developed world, in, inter alia, feeding terrorism.

In the context of U.S. polemics on whether or not poverty necessarily gives rise to terrorism (majority of those who performed attacks against the U.S.A. come from wealthier or middle strata of Arab societies) - Bush’s formulation in the mentioned speech that “some countries are against terrorism, but tolerate hatred which leads to terrorism”, having in mind Saudi Arabia and others, is notable. This is the first time that Bush has linked hate with terrorism like this. However, he only blames others, with no introspection, without contemplating whether or not some aspects of American foreign policy and conduct might be causing hatred towards the U.S.A.

It seems that America has not yet adequately faced the rising tide of anti-Americanism in the world. It is true partly that anti-Americanism is unavoidable and that regardless of what America does or does not do, it would be there simply because America is the richest, strongest country and world power with, until recently, a privilege of the sheltered geographic location; hence, some anti-Americanism would pursue America even if its policies were blameless. In Europe, for instance, anti-Americanism is endemic - either due to various inferiority complexes or because of past, often shortsighted, leftist disagreements with U.S. policies toward the former Soviet bloc, but also because of the aggression in Vietnam, the Cold War support of cruelest regimes, just to mention some of the reasons. Certainly, anti-Americanism as such is unacceptable and intellectually contemptible, as was anti-Sovietism in contrast to anti-Stalinism, as is anti-Semitism in contrast to condemnation of unacceptable acts of the Israeli state, or anti-Islamic attitudes in contrast to opposing extremist, reactionary Islamic fundamentalism of certain groups and regimes.

It is up to America to evaluate realistically whether or not today’s intensive and widely spread anti-Americanism - regardless of what one thinks of it, because it does exist - can seriously hamper, or even jeopardize “global war” against terrorism. Also, is it sufficient to wonder “how come they hate us”, and conclude “they hate us for our democratic, etc... virtues and values”, so all we should do is only to improve persuasiveness and dissemination of the truth about ourselves and our propaganda. Domestic critics of American state policy, by no means small in

number, point out that at least part of the problem might stem from the fact that the United States does not always and everywhere act in accordance with its proclaimed virtues and values.

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The tone and contents of American current discussions of what the U.S.A. represents in the world of today, what kind of factor the United States is in our world today, how it could and should act are exceedingly significant.

Madeleine Albright and others from Clinton's administration have in their time promoted a concept of the U.S.A. as an "indispensable country", which favors a "strongly assertive multilateralism" - without abandoning the option of unilateral action. And the U.S.A. really were indispensable in the Gulf in 1991, in the Balkans, in Afghanistan. And because they did not take the lead, nobody else stopped the horrible genocide in Rwanda.

Today, however, there is much more support - and without any particular hesitation - for the theses that the world is objectively "unipolar", with dominance and primacy of the United States as the objectively given world "hegemonist". Also without hesitation the United States is portrayed as an "imperial", though not imperialist superpower, the distinction being that it can exert its will and dominance globally, but without grabbing others' territories or imposing its exploitation of resources in other countries by force. Pentagon's strategy papers in the early 1990s, when the present Vice President Richard Cheney was Secretary of Defense, contain the stance that the U.S.A. should not only react to the world, but should also mold it by its own action and in its own interests, and that the U.S.A. should use all means to prevent the emergence of rival superpowers.

And here comes a paramount paradox, not to say the biggest irony of the "cunning world spirit", of the history itself. Namely, if only for the sake of discussion we should accept that the U.S.A. can do "alone" everything what it needs - there is just one thing, one piece of business, which they can in no way manage on their own, and this happens to be the first, the foremost fateful interest of the United States itself. This is nothing less than defending the country, the American people, from the exterminating terrorist attacks from the new type of enemy which cannot be vanquished only by bombs. Practically everyone in the U.S.A. concludes that for the accomplishing of this central and most vital national task the United States must achieve widest possible international cooperation. Only, this cooperation cannot be exacted just through hegemonic pressure and subordination of others. At least somewhere there must be also a willing cooperation, based upon both the identifying of common interests as well as upon a reasonable and proportionate respect of specific and different interests of others. And this not only of governments, but also of peoples.

How will the U.S.A. solve this equation does not depend only on their realistic seeing both of itself and of all the others in the world, but also on the others who must realistically understand America and its power.